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JULIAN K. GORSKI

NATO -- AN OVERVIEW
(FIRST OF FOUR PART SERIES)

ANNCR:

APRIL FOURTH WILL MARK THE 29TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY. EIGHT WEEKS LATER -- ON MAY 30TH -- THE HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE FIFTEEN-NATION ALLIANCE WILL MEET HERE IN WASHINGTON, WHERE THE TREATY WAS SIGNED, TO ASSESS NATO'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHART ITS FUTURE. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT, HERE IS VOA'S JULIAN GORSKI:

VOICE:

MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION WAS FORMED TO COUNTER THE RISING MILITARY POWER OF THE SOVIET UNION. BY THE TIME THAT NATO CAME INTO BEING MOSCOW HAD CONSOLIDATED ITS HOLD OVER MOST OF THE CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES OVERRUN BY THE RED ARMY IN THE CLOSING MONTHS OF THE WORLD WAR TWO. IN THE ENSUING YEARS, MOSCOW'S LEADERS HAVE DEMONSTRATED A DETERMINATION TO ACHIEVE SOVIET SUPREMACY IN VIRTUALLY ALL FIELDS OF MILITARY ENDEAVOR.

A RECENT STUDY OF SOVIET MILITARY OUTLAYS -- MADE PUBLIC BY THE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES -- SHOWS THAT WHILE UNITED STATES MILITARY EXPENDITURES HAVE DECLINED SHARPLY SINCE THE VIETNAM WAR, THE SOVIET UNION SPENT ABOUT 40 PERCENT MORE ON ITS ARMED FORCES LAST YEAR THAN DID THE UNITED STATES. THIS INCLUDED HEAVY SPENDING ON WEAPONS, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE SOVIET NAVY HAS GROWN IN THE PAST TWO DECADES FROM A BASCIALLY DEFENSIVE ARM OF SOVIET COASTAL WATERS TO A MULTI-OCEAN

FLEET CAPABLE OF CHALLENGING NAVIES OF THE WEST. AT THE SAME TIME MOSCOW HAS CHANNELLED HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY INTO STRATEGIC ARMS SYSTEMS -- (OPT) INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILES AND BOMBERS, DEFENSE AND COMMAND CONTROL SYSTEMS AND RELATED BRANCHES OF NUCLEAR POWER (END OPT). IT'S ESTIMATED THAT SOVIET SPENDING IN THIS AREA EXCEEDED THAT OF THE UNITED STATES BY ALMOST TWO AND A HALF TIMES DURING THE 1967-1977 PERIOD.

CONCERN OVER THE SOVIET MILITARY BUILDUP IS APPARENT IN PRONOUNCEMENTS BY WESTERN OFFICIALS. IN LONDON, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ISSUED A WHITE PAPER CLAIMING THAT ON THE CRUCIAL CENTRAL EUROPEAN FRONT SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH HEAVILY OUTWEIGHS THAT OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. NATO OFFICIALS ARE ALSO WATCHING SOVIET PROGRESS IN THE FIELD OF BALLISTIC MISSILES -- ESPECIALLY THE NEW SS-20 INTERMEDIATE MISSILE THAT CAN BE LAUNCHED FROM MOBILE PADS AND CAN BE ADAPTED TO INTERCONTINENTAL RANGES. BRITISH PRIME MINISTER JAMES CALLAGHAN HAS DESCRIBED THE SS-20 MISSILE AS A FAR MORE DANGEROUS WEAPON THAN THE NEUTRON BOMB WHICH IS BEING DEVELOPED BY THE UNITED STATES FOR USE IN DEFENDING NATO FORCES FROM A MASSIVE WARSAW PACT ATTACK.

WITHIN MONTHS AFTER TAKING OFFICE, PRESIDENT CARTER TOOK STOCK OF THE RISING IMBALANCE IN THE WARSAW PACT'S AND NATO'S MILITARY POTENTIAL. THE PRESIDENT, AT HIS FIRST NATO MEETING, CALLED FOR THE STRENTHENING OF THE NATO ALLIANCE AND PLEDGED THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL NOT ONLY KEEP CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN EUROPE, BUT WILL ALSO IMPROVE THEM AND MAINTAIN DIVERSE AND MODERN NUCLEAR FORCES ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT. AT THE SAME TIME, MR. CARTER CONTINUES TO STRESS HIS HOPE OF HALTING THE ARMS RACE AND REPLACING EAST-WEST MILITARY COMPETITION WITH PEACEFUL COOPERATION.

PRESIDENT CARTER IS NOT MERELY REFLECTING HIS COUNTRY'S QUEST FOR PEACE. HE'S ALSO FOLLOWING THE BASIC PRECEPTS UNDERLYING THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. THE BELIEF THAT THE WORLD CAN BE SAVED FROM DEVASTATING WARS FINDS EXPRESSION IN THE STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS (SALT) BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION AND IN THE TALKS ON MUTUAL, BALANCED FORCES REDUCTIC (MBFR) INSTIGATED BY THE NATO ALLIANCE.

NATO'S PEACEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE NOT CONFINED TO EFFORTS IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT ALONE. IN 1969, THE COMMITTEE ON CHALLENGES OF MODERN SOCIETY (CCMS) WAS ESTABLISHED TO FIND WAYS TO HALF THE DETERIORATION OF EARTH'S ENVIRONMENT. THE COMMITTEE HAS GIVEN PRIORITY TO THE PROBLEMS OF AIR AND WATER POLLUTION, HEALTH CARE, DRUG ABUSE, URBAN TRANSPORTATION, ENERGY, AND THE DISPOSAL OF HAZARDOUS WASTES. IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN BROADER SUPPORT FOR ITS GOALS, THE NATO GROUP OPENED ITS EXPERT-LEVEL MEETINGS TO OBSERVERS FROM NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES INCLUDING EASTERN EUROPE AND THE SOVIET UNION.

IN SHORT, NATO IS NOT ONLY FULFILLING ITS MISSION TO SHIELD THE WEST FROM AGGRESSION BUT IS ALSO EXPLORING WAYS TO REDUCE WORLD TENSIONS AND BRING ABOUT UNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL NATIONS.

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